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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how strengthening connections between the school and its community can help to improve a school's problem solving capacity. The paper is based on data collected by the Documentation and Technical Assistance Project of the Center for New Schools (Chicago, Illinois), from observation of nine school sites which were involved in school improvement projects. Of the nine sites, four emphasized intensive community involvement in school improvement, while the rest emphasized other factors. Analysis of the data indicated that: (1) the usual practice of putting parent representatives on advisory or decision making committees in a token capacity is generally ineffective and neglects the possible contributions that parents can make as active board members; (2) in sites where the community was found to have contributed significantly to problem solving, there had been deliberate efforts to build strong school-community bonds through training and socialization of school staff and community representatives; (3) effective school-community linkages emphasized particularistic rather than universalistic interaction; (4) community elites were important in forging linkages between schools and communities; and (5) strengthened bonds allowed communities to make unexpected contributions such as shielding schools from bureaucratic complications, obtaining special resources, providing skilled adjunct staff, and modifying concepts of school roles. (Author/MJL)

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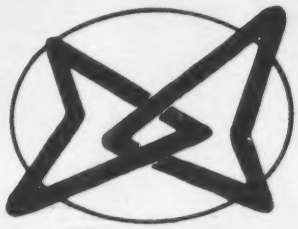

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES AS A METHOD OF IMPROVING URBAN SCHOOLS

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Stephen H. Wilson

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Documentation and Technical Assistance in Urban Schools Project (DTA) is an effort to learn more about how to make urban public schools work better for urban students. Toward this end, DTA ccombines educational research and practice within one project. DTA's mandate has three interrelated parts:

> DOCUMENTATION - to study, using primarily ethnographic techniques, the ways in which selected urban schools organize themselves to solve problems. Documentation focuses upon nine sites throughout the country selected and funded by NIE to continue to engage in locally initiated improvement activities.
>
> TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - to develop in practice specific strategies which are designed to improve urban public schooling. Technical assistance strategies are based in part upon documentation of useful practices in the nine funded sites.
>
> LINKAGE - to increase understanding, through observation of DTA's attempts to link documentation with technical assistance, of the processes through which research can be useful to practice, and practice can influence research.

This study is a product of the documentation effort. The ideas, commitment, hard work, successes and disappointments of the people directly working within urban schools on a day-to-day basis are in a very real sense the base of DTA. It is our hope that this description and analysis will be useful to researchers, policy planners and particularly to the people who work directly in schools in their efforts to improve the quality and validity of the educational experiences for urban students.

Thomas A. Wilson
DTA Project Director

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ABSTRACT

NIE funded locally initiated projects that showed promise of restructuring specific urban schools or clusters of schools in ways that would increase their ongoing capacities to solve problems. Using qualitative field methodology, the DTA project studied the nine sites selected.

Strengthening the connections between schools and their local communities (parents and neighborhood residents) was a major or minor focus of several of these projects' improvement strategies. We found that the customary emphasis of analysts and reformers on the responsiveness of bureaucracies that supposedly comes from community participation in decision making neglected other important ways community connections could support problem solving, and oversimplified what was subsumed under community participation in decision making. In addition to strengthening decision making, community connections can give the local school special power in dealing with central office bureaucracies, could modify local participants' cognitive orientations about what problems and solutions might look like, and added a set of specially skilled personnel for solving problems. The experience of the sites studied suggests that the improvement strategy of strengthening connections between schools and communities has potential yet to be realized.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, community control of the schools was a major rallying issue for school reformers. The community's (parents and neighborhood residents) direct involvement in the schools was seen as a way to insure that problems would be dealt with; the community would bring a special urgency and understanding because it was their own children whom the schools served. Reformers felt stronger ties with the community were especially important to the reform of schools because these bureaucracies had become too unwieldy and calcified to respond to the needs of the local communities; further, those holding power in urban schools were seen as unable or unwilling to comprehend the problems, aspirations and culture of the minorities the schools supposedly served.

Presently, calls for community involvement are no longer as loud or as frequent. Nonetheless, many attempts to strengthen the ties between schools and their local communities have been made since the sixties and continue now. Formalized community connections are frequently required by policy (e.g., Title I, Teacher Corps, California Local School Improvement Efforts). Thus, the nature of the ties and communications between urban communities and their schools continues to be an important issue for both theorists and reformers, and there is much to be learned from past efforts. (Some critics suggest that the emphasis on parent involvement in minority communities is a veiled accusation of inadequacy in the ways parents in these communities typically relate to the schools. They are now willing to trust the professionals. Significantly, this view has become popular only after minority professionals have assumed positions of power in school systems.)

The Documentation and Technical Assistance Project (DTA) was funded by the National Institute of Education to study nine locally initiated projects

designed to improve urban schools. Several of these projects included restructuring the connections between school and community as a strategy that would hopefully increase local problem-solving capacity. This paper is a summary of our research in these settings.

Our research suggests that strengthened bonds between urban schools and their local communities is indeed one way to aid the problem-solving process. Forming these ties, however, is not a simple process nor are beneficial results guaranteed. We specifically noted the following findings:

-- The common and seemingly simple technique that we call "put-a-parent-on-a-committee" generally does not work. To merely create advisory or decision-making boards with community representation does not recognize the power of long held expectations, traditions and patterns which can cancel out the possible special contributions of community members added to the committees and boards.

-- Building connections with the local community was a central focus--and not a casual side issue--in those sites where community ties did eventually contribute to problem solving. In these sites, specific training and socialization of both school staff and community representatives was carried out.

-- In successful sites, organizational interactions between community and school staff were characterized by particularistic rather than universalistic norms (e.g., friendships rather than formal role relationships on committees). The data raises questions about the appropriateness of universalistic norms for organizations trying to become organically linked to urban communities.

-- Community elites were important in the attempts to build bridges from the schools to the community. Reformers either had to approach and involve the existing elites or to carefully develop new elites. If they worked with the established elite, they faced the dilemma of how to spread influence beyond these few people in the elite. Events in the sites highlighted the existence of two kinds of established elites--the typically mentioned socioeconomic elite and an "activist" elite, comprised of community members who have become knowledgeable and powerful through involvement in government funded social programs of recent years.

-- Community connections can contribute to the local problem-solving process in unexpected ways. Community involvement usually meant strengthening deliberations and decision making, but these new ties can also help to support local innovative programs by insulating the school from central office dictates, winning special resources for the school, letting community members serve as specially skilled adjunct staff, and modifying the ways in which all involved conceptualize what schools are and what they should accomplish.

Strengthening (or building from scratch) the working ties betwen urban schools and their communities is not an easy task. Long established patterns of non-involvement, hostility or indifference from the central offices, and current trends that now de-emphasize the importance of community input are some of the difficulties. Even when established, these connections seem fragile, and do not always produce desired results.

Nonetheless, our researchers have observed urban school settings where a special connection between the community and the school did serve as a source of vitality and as a focus of ongoing problem solving. Participants in these projects reported that the connections were valuable, even essential, elements of their school settings. They reported beneficial effects on truancy, vandalism, community and student attitudes towards school, etc. The increasing activity of local participants in city politics and an aura of "ownership" of the schools seem to be even more pervasive and subtle effects. One participant expressed some of the effects on families in an interview:

> If the children see Mom coming in to school (and we have some fathers even coming in), and they see it is important to the parents (we have some in GED during the day), they think if it is important for them to learn, it is important for me to learn. It's like, like me--I have two older children--21 and 18, and school never was important to them because it was not important to me, until I came over here and got involved and went back to school and got my GED. And now my four younger children...school is very important to them because I got involved and it became important to me. I've got five that will graduate from high school, I have no doubt. I have one that will graduate this year, three that will graduate next year, and one that will graduate in two more years. But my oldest daughter quit school because...I let her quit because it wasn't that important to me. (Brown, 1978, p. 159)

Even with this evidence, we cannot claim that strengthening ties with the community is the only or even the best way to improve all schools. The following pages will show there is a great variability in the kinds of connections that can be built, and in their effects. The projects have no hard evidence (in standard quantitative terms) that their work improves student achievement. Certainly we have evidence from other sites that there are other strategies to encourage local problem-solving activity. Nonetheless, our data leads us to the conclusion that community involvement in the schools, once simply thought of as community representation in decision making, is a complex issue that now deserves to be revisited and not relegated to the slagheap of discarded educational fads. Strengthening the bonds between schools and communities is a strategy for improving schools which has potentials not yet realized.

Because of our desire to share as much qualitative data as possible in this limited space, we must abbreviate our review of the literature. Comprehensive reviews and bibliographies are available in Davies, 1974; Steinberg, 1978; and Saxe, 1975. We will briefly outline the line of inquiry which we see as the main underlying focus in this area and to which our study directly contributes. Researchers and theorists have concentrated primarily on who controls the schools and on the consequences of that control. The following questions summarize their line of inquiry:

-- Are urban schools unresponsive to local needs and problems? (e.g., Carlson, 1964 and Pincus, 1974 on "domestication" of schools. See Kirst, 1970; Callahan, 1975; Rogers, 1968; and Peterson, 1976 on the insulation of bureaucracies.)

-- Are urban schools especially unresponsive to the needs and problems of minority comunities? (e.g., Belluck and David, 1971; Novak, 1971; Billings, 1972; Wright, 1970; Holliday, 1977.)

-- Does strengthening the connection between the schools and their communities serve to increase the responsiveness of the schools? (e.g., Gitell, 1977; Fantini, 1969; Hapgood, 1969; Cunningham, 1970.)

-- What kinds of community connections seem to be most effective? (Most of the literature focuses on political control of various types and on various levels. We feel we make our major contribution to the literature in spelling out a wider variety of possible connections and input.)

-- Does responsiveness to the community increase the quality of education children receive? (We have seen little research that systematically investigates this question.)

-- Does this responsiveness reduce the alienation of local communities? Does responsiveness make the schools too subject to local changing political winds and introduce a dysfunctional provincialism into the education of children? (See Callahan, 1975; Cronin, 1973; and Tyack, 1974 on the history of "depoliticalization" of schools; and Dreeban, 1968 on the benefits of limits on local control of education.)

We cannot definitively answer all these research questions because our study was not specifically designed to focus on these issues and because the "answers" might look very different from different value perspectives (e.g., definitions of "unresponsive," "better education," and "provincialism" might be different for local parents, central office bureaucrats and other constituencies). Our study does provide vital data about the questions of what kinds of connections increase responsiveness and suggests ways to conceptualize "community involvement" beyond the usual idea of input into decision making.

Too often researchers and policy makers considering the big questions assume that the concept "community control of the schools" captures the essence of possible relationships between school and community. Our data show that there is a great variety in the kinds of connections that can be forged and in the ways they can contribute to ongoing improvement of the schools. Comprehensive, well-planned community involvement in decision making can indeed make a contribution, but so can other approaches. Furthermore, the difficulties of establishing any of these working relationships illustrate the complexities of what is involved in the ties between schools and their surrounding communities.

In the remainder of this section, we briefly describe the study and the sites studied. In the following sections we present the different kinds of contributions community connections made: strengthening deliberations and decision making, increasing clout in dealing with central offices, providing specially skilled adjunct staff, and changing conceptions of school. We briefly describe how these strategies were brought about and what they contributed. In a final section we describe two crucial issues the projects had to face in the process of building connections: training and orientation of projects toward elites.

A brief account follows of the methodology of the research and analysis from which this paper results. For a more detailed account see Wilson, 1977 and Smith, 1978; 1979. NIE chose nine sites as providing promising examples of attempts to build local capacities for problem solving in urban schools. They purposely chose a variety of strategies--e.g., work with organizational consultation, work with teachers as professionals and work on building community connections. The strategies were often not pure forms so there were major and minor elements. Each site consisted of a Technical Assistance Group (TAG) and the schools they worked with.

The material in this paper is based primarily on four sites where the community connection was an important feature. Events from the other sites are occasionally analyzed as relevant. The following table summarizes the strategies.

SITES WHERE COMMUNITY CONNECTION WAS IMPORTANT

*San Andreas Cultural Continuity Project	This project sought to make educators and parents aware of the discontinuities between the culture of the school and the culture of the community. They originally hoped to assist parents and educators at two schools to take action based on this awareness to reduce the discontinuity. The project ended up concentrating mostly on work with community. The project served a predominantly Black community of a large Western city.
New York City; The Council on Comprehensive Education Project (CCE) West Town High School	The NYC Board of Education contracted with a community organization representing two communities to set up and run an alternative high school. (Originally the community organization was going to undertake a multitude of educational projects.) The project sought to strengthen the collaborative process in running the school. One community was a predominantly upper middle class white one; the other was poor and Puerto Rican.
River City Creative Educational Collaboration Project; Washington School	The organizational development departmnet of the Board of Education undertook consultation to strengthen the organizational process of two schools. One of these schools had already established an active neighborhood school board and was exploring ways of building community connections. Because the functioning of the organizational consultation had little success in the other school and mostly supported the already ongoing work of the neighborhood school board in the other school, we concentrateed some of our research energy on understanding the functioning community connections in the Washington School. The school was located in a poor, racially mixed community in a medium sized Southern City.

SITES WHERE COMMUNITY CONNECTION WAS IMPORTANT (Cont.)

New York City; Responsive Education Project	Building upon a theory of child development and open education, this project worked to help teachers develop as professionals. It helps teachers become clearer about the articulation of teaching with child development and helped them develop mutually supportive communities where they could learn from each other. The philosophy and operations of the project emphasized the continuity of learning at home and in the community with learning at school and encouraged development of a partnership between parents and teachers. The project schools served an economically and ethnically mixed community of white, Black and Spanish students.

SITES WHERE OTHER FEATURES WERE EMPHASIZED

New York City Inner City Consortium Southend Intermediate School	This project supported an intermediate school in its attemmpts to develop an organization based on mini schools. The school also had a school planning and advisory team which included parents and student members. It served a predominantly Puerto Rican community.
New York City; School Self Improvement Project Coalition of Business and Education Collaboration (CBEC)	This project worked with eight high schools to stimulate an atmosphere of improvement and to develop organizational process of planning and development. Parents and community members were included in committees. The schools were located in a variety of New York communities.
Iroquois City Satellite Teacher Center	This project supported the development of a teacher center to serve four schools. Community members were part of the governing board of the teacher center. The project was located in a medium sized Midwestern city and served economically mixed communities.
Central City Teacher Participation Project	This project worked at eight schools to encourage teacher involvement in decision making through the formation of faculty senates and constitutions. Community members were on the governing board of the project. The project was located in a medium sized Western City and served economically and ethnically mixed communities.
Federal City	This project worked with administrators and teachers to help them develop skills of systematic planning. Located in a large Eastern city, the schools served ethnically heterogeneous communities.

*Names of projects are pseudonymed; underlines indicate name used in text.

A field researcher studied each of these sites for a period of roughly two years. They used qualitative methodology which included observation, formal and informal interviewing, document analysis, as well as quantitative techniques in some sites. Each researcher wrote a case study summarizing observations and analysis. They also regularly prepared field data forms (semi-processed field notes) on events they observed and interviews they conducted. Each researcher was responsible for developing his/her own research plan under the general rubric of documenting the funded strategy--e.g., understanding what the TAG hoped to do to build local capacities for problem solving, what happened as they tried to implement the strategies and why, how local school people interpreted events, etc. Thus, the data specifically bearing on community connections varies from site to site based on what each site's strategy was and on how the site researcher's research plan evolved.

The author of this paper was head of the team in charge of documenting the nine sites. This paper is based on intensive reading of the case studies, the field data forms, site documents, conversations with researchers, conversations with site participants, and visits to the sites. Some of the analytic themes are built on those developed by site researchers and some were developed by me through my own iterative process of grounded theory development (reading field data forms, developing tentative hypotheses, checking them out through conversations or more data reading, further elaboration, checking, etc.)

The reader should thus be aware that this paper is secondary analysis of qualitative data and is subject to limitations. While I had first hand experience with all the sites, I did not have the rich and daily contact

that a field researcher had. Thus, in spite of efforts to check my interpretations, it is inevitable that I might not fully capture participant perspectives on every point. Similarly, since I was not out in the field daily, framing the research, some of the themes I identify have not been fully probed and explored through saturated data collection. Lastly, the limits of journal length format have forced me to summarize, to condense, to abbreviate or eliminate many of the stories that convey so much context and feeling, and to leave out many of the extenuating details and analyses. Obviously, the stories are more complex than they are presented here and the reader is urged to read the larger reports and case studies upon which this article is based. Although these limitations are frustrating, they are not annihilating. The experiences of the sites were sufficiently important that they should be considered and shared, even in this summarized form.

STRENGTHENING DELIBERATIONS AND DECISION MAKING

Put-a-Parent-on-the-Committee-Approach

There is a perennial approach (e.g., Title I Advisory Committees, Teacher Corps) which constantly surfaces when connections with parents and neighborhood are sought. A seemingly straightforward technique is adopted of creating advisory or policy boards in which parents have representation. It is assumed that the community's presence on these boards guarantees that the perspectives, support and resources of this constituency will be brought to bear in a sustained way on the problems of the school.

Several sites we studied put parents on committees although their major emphasis was elsewhere--usually on getting teachers and administrators to participate together in new ways. For example, the Coalition of Business and Education Collaboration (CBEC) strategy was an attempt to try to rationalize the planning and problem-solving process and to generate a spirit of renewal. One major step in this process was the creation of a problem identification committee at each school with members from all constituencies, including community. Although this project had some success in stimulating school staff to plan, it did not seem to generate any special ongoing connection with the community. The community representatives ended up being a very minor part of the ongoing committees--both in numbers and in quality of participation. Nothing special was done to clarify the constituency they represented or to facilitate the flow of communication in either way between representatives and community. In fact (as was true in several of the sites), the "community" representatives tended to be paraprofessionals who were easy to identify and get to meetings but also who may have a very different kind of perspective and stake than parents and

community in general. For example, they may have been socialized into school culture and the fact that their paychecks came from the school may have limited their willingness to take certain positions. Few members of the community constituency generated ideas and programs to be considered by the ongoing committees.

The planners of the Iroquois City teacher center had a similar experience. The center was created to serve the teachers of four schools and was governed by a 17-member board, eight of whom were parent/community representatives. Several of these community representatives were paraprofessionals. Ultimately, however, community membership on the board had very little impact.

The teacher center faced a problem central to many of the innovations we studied--a fundamental question of self-definition and clarity of purpose which might be expected in any organization without a history or tradition. Thus the members of the governing board, and especially the community members, were confused about their function and their possible contributions. Without special attention to these newly developed roles in unfamiliar situations, the possible contributions of community members can easily be lost.

Given the ambiguity of the center itself and the community members' discomfort with the formalized structure of serving on a governing board, most of the success that the teacher center had in reaching out to the community was based on a history of personalized ties. A bond between parents and school staff at one of the schools had been forged back in the Model Cities days, and there was obvious mutual support and warmth as they spoke of those days.

Bonds of informal support between parents and school staff were also evident at Southend School (in a different project), where part of the improvement strategy called for a school policy-making team composed of

school staff, parent and student representatives. Although parents and students were not verbally active in the meetings, their participation was felt in strong symbolic ways and there was a good deal of interaction outside the meeting rooms. The ties were expressed in ways such as the school principal giving personal advice and being a godfather for local families. Through such bonds the parents felt connected to the school and may have felt their views were represented in effective, if indirect, ways.

These observations at Southend and Iroquois City raise important practical and theoretical questions about the requirements for "participation" in schools. There is a bias in modern, urban, organizational societies towards formalized, universalistic, contractual relationships in which almost any person can fill a given role. But non-industrialized societies are characterized as having more particularistic forms of relationships in which personal and historical bonds deeply influence interactions (Stinchecombe, 1965). Since minority subcultures in the United States often preserve this form of preferred non-formal interaction, perhaps typical ways of thinking about the benefit and forms of client participation in schools (and other social service agencies) are missing an important element. Rather than seeing particularistic bonds as hampering smooth functioning or as merely adding interesting spice to basically contractual relationships, we suggest that acknowledging the legitimacy of informal ties may be a powerful way to build parental influence into decision making. See Holmes (1978) for more on the importance of particularistic ties in technical assistance.

There are some important limitations. These bonds seem heavily dependent on personalities. Would either Iroquois City or Southend have the implicit rapport they do if the key people were to leave? Also it may be

difficult for outsiders to break in. Particularistic bonds depend on history and personality--outsiders may feel welcomed into meetings more than into friendships. Both the parent and the educator assume that the educator implicitly knows what is in the parent's interest. Whereas formal participation creates multiple opportunities to check this out--for example through obvious polling--the informal pattern may not because bonds presuppose trust and loyalty. It is possible that the educational program can in reality be missing the parental perspectives and the norms of informal connections do promote the surfacing of these issues.

Community Connections as a Major Focus

We turn now to the sites where parental connections were central elements of the improvement strategy. One site which in some ways was the most successful in forming an ongoing connection illustrates a combination of formal and informal ties. The Washington School neighborhood school board that we studied was composed of equal members of parents and staff. The board exercised a great deal of power in deciding upon curriculum and program and in evaluating school staff. For instance, they demanded a concern for reading and writing in a school which was oriented toward open education affective goals and they aggressively did not tolerate teachers who didn't respect students.

The board incorporated itself as a not-for-profit organization and undertook neighborhood projects over and above the school--e.g., neighborhood rehabilitation, a drug abuse program, and a bus service for the elderly. Most members of the school staff and most participating parents expressed satisfaction that there was a strong and viable connection between the community and the school. Most professional staff donated part of their

salaries to pay community workers. Vandalism and absenteeism were lower than for comparable schools.

The format this participation took illustrates the importance of particularistic interaction. On the surface it fit the formal model--there were official roles of parent participation with universalistic trappings of election and duties. There was also, however, a strong undercurrent of personal particularistic relationships. The school staff and parents visited, picnicked, and drank together over the years. The meetings and roles were just the surface and underneath was a pattern of personal influence and emotional support and concerns.

The decision to run the board in this personal way had been a conscious one. The principal and some of his core staff came out of a humanistic, sensitivity training tradition. They believed human endeavors required that people get to know each other on many levels of intimacy. They had regular group sensitivity sessions. The Washington principal, a prime force in this attempt, reflected as his approach in an interview:

> Our workshops have been...90 percent gut level talking about problems. Well, we found that when we went out and tried to have a task in a workshop, that we pissed around there until it was time for a break. Then we'd have ourselves a few drinks and somebody would get into heavy things and we'd come back for a session and spend the whole night dealing with an interpersonal problem that had nothing to do with the task... You solve that interpersonal problem and the task goes. You see, it's the personal problem that hangs up the task. (Brown, 1978, p. 137)

The Council on Comprehensive Education (CCE) project, although also a serious and comprehensive attempt to build connections with the local community, did not have nearly the success of the River City project. CCE made a formal attempt to empower parents and community members by establishing several committees, but the community members largely found the world and

the language of the committees to be alien. School staff ended up making most decisions by default.

CCE attempted to serve a community of both Puerto Rican and upper middle class families and was never totally successful in bridging that cultural gap in the 1970s. In the '60s, CCE worked because of the symbolic credibility it had in both of these communities, even without active participation. In a changing and increasingly hostile milieu, the symbolic bond alone could not carry the project without structural changes. The alternative school established prospered but with a decreased emphasis on community participation.

We turn now to two very different models of promoting parent and neighborhood influence on deliberations. Both of them start with units smaller than the whole school. The Responsive Education project, for example, focused on supporting teachers in the development of their skills of tying their teaching to the growth patterns of children and in helping them to build ways of providing mutual collegial support. Parents were considered as partners in the education of the whole child. In joint and separate child study sessions, parents and teachers explored children's behavior at home and at school, the child development education theory at the heart of the project, and current events in the city and school system as they bore on the education of the children. The parents helped in the hallway communities created by teachers for mutual support.

In these activities there was no explicit emphasis on politically structuring a formal role in decision making or deliberation. Indeed, the project did not see that as even necessary for teachers. Norms required that support and cooperation characterize parent-teacher interactions.

A parent writing in a newsletter of the project expressed this view:

> One danger in a (parent) committee, particularly in the early stages of a developing program, is that it can easily become a watchdog committee rather than a support committee. This creates suspicion and distrust between parent and teacher and can destroy the essential elements of building and planning together that are so necessary...We have tried to keep the open corridor committee a support committee. (Karunakaran, 1978)

This kind of influence differs, of course, from those described earlier. The focus of where influence can be most effective (e.g., classroom vs. school policy board) is seen differently as is the most desirable form of influence (child centered observation and substantive discussion vs. policy deliberation). "Volunteerism" is also an issue with this project. Because parents had chosen for their children to be in these classrooms, they may not have had the same need for influence as a parent who had had no choice.

The Cultural Continuity project used yet another method of addressing the question of connections with neighborhood and parents. Core project staff analyzed that there was a critical discontinuity between the schools and the Black children and comunities they served. Because of racism, the school's curriculum, forms of instruction and underlying orientations worked against supporting children's achievement. The project hoped to work with parents and school staff to educate them about this discontinuity and about ways schools could better serve the children. For many reasons the work with school staff never developed as project staff hoped. The work with parents did develop and illustrates another pattern of connection.

The project director believed that the forces of institutional racism were so strong that parents had to be organized to exert a force. A formal

and informal watchdog role was seen as best. Parents could best be involved as advocates--making sure that decisions and policies moved toward reducing the discontinuity wherever possible.

The connection therefore is that of adversary. Sometimes this connection was directly manifested as, for example, when parents agitated to get the food in the cafeteria changed, and when they tried to get rid of teachers they judged unacceptable. Most often, however, the connection was more subtle. Although it was very hard to get data on this issue, we suspect that the knowledge that there was an organized group of sophisticated parents had an effect on school staff. They knew their actions would be scrutinized and they would meet with vocal opposition if they did something unacceptable.

In each of these settings there was an attempt to build a new connection between the school and the community. Clearly, however, they did not fit one standard form but rather the forms ranged from joint participation on a policy board to classroom substantive discussions between teacher and parent, to a parent adversary group. In several of the sites, participants felt that these connections enriched the deliberation process and structurally enhanced the school improvement possibilities. When the approach went beyond the simple put-a-parent-on-a-comittee, educationally relevant deliberations could be affected at many different levels and in many different ways.

POLITICAL CLOUT IN DEALING WITH SCHOOL SYSTEM BUREAUCRACY

Those who seek to analyze the problems with urban schools often point to financial problems and bureaucratic inflexibility as causes of urban school malaise (e.g., Gollub, 1978). Some claim there isn't anything anyone can do against such momentous forces. In DTA sites we have observed things that could be done.

In some sites, community connections served the school by insulating their special programs from onslaught by central offices and by winning the extra resources and flexibility necessary to institute or maintain programs. Parents and community members were able to bring forces to bear on central offices which school staffs could not. The mustering of these forces and the threat of their exercise made an ongoing contribution to the schools' ability to take action to address problems as perceived by local participants.

Several caveats are necessary. Using political muscle has more to do with surviving and warding off deterioration rather than with sustained, long-term improvement of programs. There is also the question of generalizability. By definition, using clout means making exceptions--e.g., getting rules waived. Not every program can be the exception. Finally, the full story of clout would require the perspective of the central offices, which our research was not designed to study. Activities considered problem-solving by the local schools might well have been considered problem-causing by the central office.

CCE's experiences illustrate the importance of clout. CCE had negotiated a special supporting services contract for West Town High School when it was originally set up. The board of education gave the school and

community organization the average per student expenditure as a lump sum to be spent as they judged most likely to facilitate the school's goals (teaching positions were paid by the board). The school was able to use these funds to raise other money (e.g., by writing proposals and by getting matching funds) and to increase services (e.g., by hiring part-time teachers with a wide range of expertise). The school considered the supporting services contract essential to its operations.

As the New York City financial crisis intensified, the head of the school system department in which the school was supervised indicated the supportive services contract would not be renewed. Significantly, the chancellor of schools who had supported the school had left since the first contract was agreed to. The community organization began to rally political support. This support included members of the bureaucracy, members of the elected school board, politicians in local government and even a United States Senator. The school (and the community organization) had been funded and had won support and flexibility when the political winds were more favorable but many of their connections still held positions of power and influence.

Ultimately, the school was able to retain half of its supporting services contract. This sequence of events demonstrates how a community connection allowed a school to maintain a program against an unfavorably disposed bureaucracy and against decreasing financial resources. School staff alone probably would not have been able to muster these resources because they would be attacking decisions of people who were their supervisors and because the political power they could bring to bear (votes, influential people) would not be as clear.

In the Responsive Education project a school got declassified as a Title I school. This meant that someone judged that the school no longer had a sufficient proportion of poor children to qualify for some special funds and programs. The parents protested the declassification. One woman's husband had been a lawyer on the commission that worked with this legislation. They managed to get the school reclassified as Title I. In all these situations one must ask whether any organized community could support their schools in this way or if their influence depended on the upper middle class or activist elite networks that they had.

When new, less favorably disposed, school officials tried to close down the Washington School, community connections again made the key difference. The neighborhood school board had been growing stronger and stronger by involving more people, building links with other community organizations, supporting its members to become politically active, incorporating itself as a not-for-profit organization and winning public service contracts (e.g., mini bus for the elderly, neighborhood renovation). They were able to mount a powerful political and media campaign to save their school.

This section has demonstrated an important kind of ongoing contribution a community connection can make to urban school life. Participants in each of these schools and projects were partially protected by their community links. Given this protection, they felt they were able to continue to move in the direction of school improvement as they saw it.

Attempts are often made to identify generic differences between urban and non-urban schools. One crucial difference we would note is this

political context. Because of factors deriving from the size of urban systems (e.g., the size and multiple levels of the bureaucracy; the formalization of personnel relations) and from the history (e.g., the waves of different immigrant groups seeking power, the financial state of cities), the control and allocation of resources and priorities has become a key issue. Each school and each attempt to change what happens in classrooms is subject to these forces. Often these forces concerning resources and control exert more influence on what happens than do more formal educational rationales. Political problem solving--coping with these forces in a way that harnesses them or at least neutralizes them--is one of the most important kinds of action.

It is also important to realize that a connection with neighborhood and parents is not the only way to deal with the reality of bureaucracy and politics. In other sites, local school people cultivated their own connections with officials. Rather than fighting them, they joined them. (See Hyde, 1977 for more on how principals worked within these alternative approaches.) Finally, we should note that in the long run, working with the bureaucracy seemed less fraught with difficulties than working against it. There were limits to how often these political forces could be mustered and how long the central office could be blocked.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS ADJUNCT STAFF

The lack of human resources is one constant complaint used to explain why urban schools are unable to free up staff time for necessary activities such as planning and training. Therefore, the availability of volunteers and paraprofssionals for tasks such as paper work or cafeteria help is often thought of as a major contribution which the school's community connection can provide. In many schools this is the only use made of parents and a dangerous stereotype is perpetuated. In some sites we studied, however, community members were seen as more than extra menial hands. Attempts were made to capitalize on the special kinds of expertise and relationships to children that community members brought to their work. The presence of community members in these roles as non-teacher adults with special skills and knowledge significantly widened the range of resources available to solve problems.

For the Cultural Continuity project, parent and community assistance in the educational program was essential because the project believed many teachers--coming from backgrounds so different from that of the students--lacked experiences, skills and perspectives necessary for teaching Black students effectively. Project leaders saw trained parents as being able to supplement the teachers and help educate them. For example, one teacher favorably disposed toward the project reported that a volunteer had helped her greatly by helping her to understand the importance of discipline and to establish sensitive, effective methods.

The Responsive Education project also used parents in the educational program. Teachers were trying to create open classrooms where there would be a wider range of simultaneous activities going on than in traditional

classrooms. Within this format, parents taught small groups of students in subjects with which the parents were comfortable, ranging from reading groups to weaving. Even more, since the project sought to integrate school and home learning and promote teachers and parents learning from each other, parent involvement in the educational program was a natural outcome. Washington School, also promoting open education, used parents as co-teachers. Illustrating the flexibility this gave the school, the principal proudly noted he was once able to call a spontaneous special crisis meeting of all faculty because parents were able to cover all classrooms.

CCE had less parent direct assistance in the educational program than the projects previously discussed. This kind of involvement was not an essential emphasis in this project. In another way, however, the community as skilled resource did make an ongoing contribution. As an alternative high school, the staff valued learning experiences out in the community and teaching by non-traditional teachers. For example, internships in community agencies were established. Educational programs were thus more flexible as teachers could respond to student needs and interests in ways that their counterparts in schools that didn't cultivate skilled community resources could not.

This section has shown how a community connection can actually supplement the educational program of the schools. The potential of parents and community members as adjunct staff in the educational program greatly expands the options available in preparing solutions to educational problems. Parents and other community members can add new dimensions of expertise, experience and connectedness to their children. Even when not doing anything different than teachers, they expand the flexibility of

school programs--e.g., teachers can plan more simultaneous activities than they could without parents. Also their presence can support other problem-solving activity by freeing up time for school staff to meet.

Again, the mere presence of community members in the classrooms does not make an automatic contribution. There needs to be systematic attention to how community people will function and both community members and school staff need to be trained to take advantage of the possibilities. The most successful use of community seems to take place in contexts that welcome initial involvement in whatever level the volunteers are comfortable, but also support increasing involvement and responsibility and avoid demeaning roles. Also, the parent contributions seem to be easily incorporated in so-called "open" programs, which have more flexibility and value a range of expertise so they can capitalize on the non-professional teachers.

CHANGING THE CONCEPTION OF SCHOOL

In this section we consider an effect of the community connection which is more pervasive, more subtle and more elusive than the others we have considered. School problem solving presumes a framework for judging what are problems and what might be solutions. Most of the projects we observed which cultivated the community connection hoped to change people's basic conceptions about what schools were about and their possible relationships to the larger community. They hoped to broaden the notion of school to be something which had a much more organic bond with the communities in which it was located and from which its students came. From this point of view, the community connection and the way it affected people's thoughts and aspirations was itself the contribution. (For more on the importance of cognitive frameworks in school improvement and methods for changing cognitive frameworks, see Wilson, 1977a.)

Both Washington School and CCE worked with the idea of the community school. They believed that poor urban communities need localized agencies which can centralize and coordinate the community's social services. Ideally, the schools would be a part of this coordinated approach, since the problems faced by children and their families do not naturally follow the artificial boundaries of "school," "hospital," "mental health center," etc. Even more, the fact that the school could respond to a full range of concerns meant that it would be seen more favorably by students and their families.

This kind of comprehensive institution can be viewed as running counter to the trends of the larger modern society. Perhaps it is time to stop asking how best to socialize the poor and minorities into this formalized

mainstream and ask instead whether a community school might offer a model of a social service agency more in keeping with the natural folk cultures of the communities served by urban schools.

Washington School and CCE also raise a paradoxical question about the community school. Is this idea on the rise or on the wane? CCE's program included an alternative high school, day care, adult education, special bilingual programs, a home for teenagers, and medical care programs--all begun in the late '60s or early '70s and now losing both participation and enthusiasm from the community and funding from the government. At the same time, the range of programs around Washington School was growing along with the eagerness and enthusiasm of the community. Why?

We can speculate that much of the difference may be that River City (home of Washington School) is a southern city and therefore less subject to the financial crises of New York City, where CCE is located. Also, the community surrounding Washington was more stable and had a clearer identity. Perhaps the social movements of the sixties, although they took longer to reach the south, will take better root there.

Even with Washington School, however, we don't know how expansive or even secure the community school concept was. The principal who had been a prime mover left the school at the end of our last year of observation. Nonetheless, the way participants talked about their settings during the heydays indicates that the projects had some success in changing the way people viewed schools--for example, some teachers began to define their work more in terms of community organizing rather than teaching. We will have to wait to see how persistent these changes are.

Two other sites also worked to change the basic conceptualizations

about schools and communities. The Cultural Continuity project believed that both the cultural heritage and the social oppression of Blacks supported the notion of the community school. But the Cultural Continuity project was clearly an outsider to the schools; indeed, it was seen as an adversary by many school staff. This restricted access limited its effectiveness in demonstrating in concrete terms the different conception of school, and in serving community members with a variety of services.

The project tried to make inroads. It held a conference on the community school concept for parents and staff, but this conference was poorly attended for a variety of reasons. It also planned to involve other community agencies in the life of the school by aggressively recruiting their commitment and by acting as a clearinghouse resource for parents and staff. These plans were quickly de-emphasized as new priorities emerged. Still, the project did succeed in changing and reinforcing new conceptions of schools and schooling for those who participated in its activities. They came to see the school as a crucial link in the struggle to liberate the Black community.

The Responsive Education project also worked on changing conceptions, although not in the same way as these other projects. Project staff believed that there needed to be an essential continuity between the learning a child does out of school and the learning he or she does in school. While they accepted the idea of a specialized institution called school, they believed its methods ought to be more congruent with and related to home learning. They believed that home and school ought to be genuine partners. They hoped to change the conceptions of both school staff and parents in this way and thus to reshape the way people thought of school

improvement. They had some success, and the boundaries between school and home were made more permeable for children as they went about learning, and for parents and educators as they thought about child development.

In changing the ways people thought about schools, these projects began to change the way people thought about problems and solutions. Solutions were no longer limited to what could be done in a 9 to 3 classroom. Problems were also conceived of in a more ambitious way--e.g., at CCE, how to arrange for student transition into work world instead of just how to provide vocational education. For participants this new way of thinking was a major benefit of the community connection.

TRAINING AND ORIENTATION TO ELITES

The previous sections have emphasized the description of the various forms of community connections and the nature of the contributions they make to problem solving. The way the projects built these connections has been an implicit element of these events. This section explicitly focuses on two issues important in the process of establishing these school/community structures.

Training

The data suggests that one of the keys to success in creating beneficial school/community connections is the special attention paid to training and socialization. Those sites with some success seemed to recognize the disruptive (e.g., parents have not traditionally been asked to serve on committees, assumptions that teachers know best, etc.) power of old patterns and expectations and explicitly planned training for both community members and school staff. Indeed, the site researcher suggested that one critical reason for CCE's difficulties in formally empowering the community may have been its failure to train parents for the alien world of meetings, organizational roles and organizational politics.

While some training seemed necessary, the specific kind undertaken varied with the nature of the projects. The Cultural Continuity project, for example, assumed that for schools to genuinely serve the Black community, both school staff and community members had to come to value continuity and to see the importance of the school's processes and goals being consonant with the styles, values and aspirations of the Black community.

Teachers needed to be helped to change the educational process to speak to Black culture and to respect parents and other community members as allies and resources for accomplishing this goal. Parents were also to be helped to acquire these new perspectives on education.

Even more, parents were to be taught concrete skills that would enable them to make headway against an insensitive or hostile school bureaucracy--e.g., comprehension of school budgets and regulations, familiarity with federal programs, and skills of using public meetings and media. The project achieved its overt success in working with parents and had difficulty in working with school staff because of internal project disagreements about strategy and because school staff were fearful of what they saw as an adversarial stance of the project.

Washington School also recognized the importance of training but saw a different kind as important. As mentioned earlier, they believed planned sensitivity sessions could help community members and school staff come to work together in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and affection. Although some staff and community members rejected the sensitivity sessions, most participants felt that this "training" was an essential ingredient in their successfully working together.

The Washington School neighborhood school board's involvement in evaluating faculty performance illustrates this approach. The "training" for these activities consisted of sessions designed to help parents build confidence in their ability to reflect on the teaching process and to help teachers deal with their fears about being evaluated. The sessions set a tone of cooperation and mutual help.

Thus, these two projects held very different philosophies of training

and socialization. They were similar, however, in understanding that new roles and relationships would require special attention, in the importance they placed on training and in the way they tried to integrate the training with the daily life of the projects and the schools.

Orientation to Elites

To speak simply of connections between a school and a community underemphasizes the complex power and demographic structures of urban communities. Almost all the projects we observed faced a paradoxical issue. To start out successfully, it seemed that they had to connect up with community elites, i.e., those with recognized knowledge, skills, experiences and reputations. To continue in the way they wanted they had to spread participation beyond the elite to a wider circle. Almost all had difficulty accomplishing this goal.

We observed two kinds of elites active in the projects: a socio-economic elite (upper middle class, well educated, ethnically varied--although primarily white--persons who had a commitment to quality integrated public education), and an "activist elite" (individuals from lower income backgrounds--predominantly minorities--who had assumed positions of responsibility through activity in the social programs of the sixties). This activist elite is especially interesting because one of the purposes of the social programs of the '60s was the creation of alternative status structures by providing power, money, and information to previously disenfranchised groups (Rogler, 1972). The continuing activity of this elite in the programs indicates the strategy was somewhat successful.

Even this activist elite, however, with its roots firmly in the

community being served, was often unable to induce wide participation. For example, community organizers and parents with a history of activism composed the core of the Cultural Continuity project. Although this group was able to influence events at the schools, they had trouble (even with phone and door-to-door contacts) involving the wider circle they hoped for. The CCE project had a similar problem with its Hispanic community.

It may be unwarranted, however, to conclude from these experiences that there was no connection between the activist elites and their communities. Reports of favorable neighborhood opinion and occasional demonstrations of solidarity when large numbers showed up at crisis meetings suggest that these individuals may have had "soul" bonds that allowed them powerfully to represent their communities, even without ongoing structural manifestations of connections with wider circles. The long-term viability of these symbolic ties (as opposed to concrete structural bonds) is an open question, however, because there was evidence in these sites that support waned as time went on.

Participation in the Responsive Education project was based totally on volunteerism (parents and teachers participated only if they wanted to). In this mixed community upper middle class parents were more likely than lower class, minority parents to send their children to the voluntary participating classrooms and to participate in support activities. The project's strategy for spreading participation seemed to rely primarily on gaining a reputation for good education for children which would draw people in and on offering non-threatening educational workshops for parents. Also, a bilingual parent facilitator was hired. The numbers of minority parents sending their children slowly grew although some of them remained

suspicious of open education. Minority parents still were infrequent participants in the core parent support groups. This strategy of spreading participation is an interesting alternative to more head-on strategies, but questions must be asked about its slowness and its difficulty in inducing high levels of participation for certain groups.

Washington School offers a pattern very different from those previously described and raises the possibility of building community connections without first going through established elites. The principal and his staff seemed to have started working originally with parents who considered themselves "just plain folks." Careful attention was paid to make people comfortable. Parents were welcome to participate at any level they wanted and there was a tone to meetings that made them very "down home". Participation on the neighborhood school board was the first major community activity for many parents. School staff consciously worked to support the growth of self-confidence and to gently push (encourage) parents to become more active and to take on new responsibilities. In fact one woman who had not been active before ended up running for alderman and winning. Washington School had an important credo that even without an experienced elite, people's skills would develop over time with sufficient support.

Even though they built their own elite, the established elite eventually had to be won over. Initially, other neighborhood activists distrusted the school and "radical" staff. They came to accept them only after the school staff supported the work of other community agencies during crises.

SUMMARY

NIE funded locally initiated projects that showed promise of restructuring specific urban schools or clusters of schools in ways that would increase their ongoing capacities to solve problems. Using qualitative field methodology, the DTA project studied the nine sites selected.

Strengthening the connections between schools and their local communities (parents and neighborhood residents) was a major or minor focus of several of these projects' improvement strategies. We found that the customary emphasis of analysts and reformers on the responsiveness of bureaucracies that supposedly comes from community participation in decision making neglected other important ways community connections could support problem solving, and oversimplified what was subsumed under community participation in decision making. In addition to strengthening decision making, community connections can give the local school special power in dealing with central office bureaucracies, could modify local participants' cognitive orientations about what problems and solutions might look like, and added a set of specially skilled personnel for solving problems.

We found that the simple put-a-parent-on-a-committee approach (creation of advisory or decision-making boards with community representation) did not work. Those projects in which a strengthened community connection genuinely enhanced deliberations and decision making, recognized that overcoming old patterns necessitated comprehensive work. Strengthening community participation was a major focus of their work and not a casual side issue. The projects trained and socialized both school staff and community members, and when they didn't, they experienced difficulties. Working either with a core

group of socioeconomic elites and/or activist elites, they struggled with spreading participation to a wider circle. They did not demand that community members adhere to formal, rigid organizational routines but rather encouraged informal, person-to-person methods typical of the folk cultures in the communities from which parents came.

We observed three different models of community-school decision making, each of which had strengths and weaknesses: creation of collaborative school-wide governing boards, creation of an ongoing pattern of collaborative work and discussions at the classroom level focused on child learning, and creation of a well trained parent adversary group whose existence shaped school staffs' decision making.

Strong community connections can also serve local schools by insulating them from actions by central offices which locals consider detrimental to valued programs and by winning special flexibility or resources. Community connections give local schools these powers because community members can be freer than school staffs in challenging the bureaucracy and can be more effective in mobilizing political and media forces to support their views. Although this strategy of community/school challenge of the bureaucracy seemed viable in the short term, it seemed that compromise with the bureaucracy was necessary in the long term.

Community connections can also provide the schools with adjunct staff. Those projects which used parents and community members in this way were careful to avoid casting the community participants only in stereotypical, menial roles. As co-teachers, for example, they were able to free staff for improvement activities such as planning. Even more importantly, they functioned as human resources with special skills and perspectives derived

from their roles as parents or community members that could be used in programs to solve school problems.

Finally, changing the ways people thought about schools and their problems was perhaps the most subtle and pervasive contribution made by community connections. Two projects promulgated a broadened view of schools as community centers and provided wide-ranging social services. When individuals held this view, they conceptualized their problems in broader terms and could consider a wider range of solutions using more varied resources than when they held a more restricted view of schools. One project tried to spread a view of open education that expanded the way people thought about the continuity between school and home/community learning. Another project tried to foster an orientation toward schooling that emphasized the necessity of continuity between the goals and processes of schools and the culture of the Black comunity. All these projects shared in common a view that urban school problem solving and decreasing alienation required that the customary conceptualization of schools as specialized limited institutions be changed.

None of these projects achieved the total success they sought. All of the school/community connections they built were difficult to bring about and seem fragile and vulnerable. Yet participants in these projects claimed that the school/community connection was helping on an ongoing basis to make their schools better, and our observers noted that the school/community connection seemed genuinely to stimulate improvement activity. We have noted that there is a great variety of what these school/community connections can look like. We urge both analysts and reformers to seriously reconsider this approach to school reform and keep it from becoming another dead-end educational fad.

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